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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002659

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DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: USUPASHVILI ADDRESSES NOVEMBER 2 PROTEST,  
ELECTIONS WITH AMBASSADOR

REF: A. TBILISI 2559

[B](#). TBILISI 2483

[C](#). TBILISI 2596

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: On October 24, Chairman of the opposition Republican Party David Usupashvili met with Ambassador regarding the united opposition's planned November 2 protest against the Saakashvili government (ref A). Usupashvili voiced two main concerns about the protests: First, that the government -- or an outside party (i.e. Russia) -- could provoke violence and spark a crackdown; second, that Irakli Okruashvili may attend the protest and inflame the crowd. Usupashvili had met on October 23 with Speaker of Parliament Nino Burjanadze (ref B) and shared the same two concerns. He said that he believes the government is taking a wait-and-see attitude toward the protest, and that their reaction will depend on the size of the crowd it attracts. He said Saakashvili is playing "dirty politics" by offering to lower the threshold only now that he is under pressure (ref C), rather than earlier in the summer. Usupashvili reiterated that he believes the best solution to the current situation for both the opposition and government remains early elections in spring 2008. End Summary.

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November 2 Protest Plans Continue  
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[2](#). (C) On October 24, leader of the opposition Republican Party, David Usupashvili, met with Ambassador to discuss the upcoming November 2 protest and the status of the opposition's United National Council. Usupashvili told Ambassador that he and the Council are trying to find a solution to the current political situation. Usupashvili said that the Council has an internal working agreement that no party leaders will jeopardize the group's united front.

[3](#). (C) Usupashvili said the opposition continues to meet with people throughout the regions. (Note: Opposition-sponsored rallies in Batumi and Kutaisi during the past two weeks each drew crowds of a few thousand. End note.) He said he does not know exactly how many will participate on November 2, but he expects at least three times the number that attended on September 28, or around 30,000. The upper limit of anyone's expectations is 100,000. Usupashvili stated that the opposition Council is not planning to "cross any lines" during the protest, and that they do not want to lose control of the crowd. He said that he believes the government does not know what to expect from the protest either, but that they are taking a wait-and-see attitude. Usupashvili believes the government's response will depend on the turnout at the protest.

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Usupashvili Meets Burjanadze  
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14. (C) Usupashvili said his understanding of the government's position came from a meeting with Parliamentary Speaker Nino Burjanadze on October 23. Usupashvili said Burjanadze asked him why the opposition does not work together in Parliament, in committees, and on legislation. He replied that this is not the issue that should be discussed now. Burjanadze told him that the government is now thinking about changing the election code. He countered that they should have done this during the summer. Usupashvili said that Saakashvili and Burjanadze, unlike Minister of Internal Affairs Merabishvili, care about the country and its future. He said it will be bad for the government if they are seen to fold under pressure, but it is their fault that they have driven people to the street. He stated that he and Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way party) have tried to focus the Council's demands on election issues and not on Saakashvili's resignation.

15. (C) Usupashvili advised Burjanadze of the Council's two main concerns regarding the November 2 demonstration. First, he worries that if the pressure on the government mounts, some ministers (implying Merabishvili) could provoke violence to allow the government to crackdown and disperse the protesters. Equally serious could be a staged provocation by a foreign interest, specifically Russia. Usupashvili's second concern is that Irakli Okruashvili might attend, which he fears would cause the people to demand direct action from him against the government. Finally, Usupashvili told Burjanadze that although early elections are not the Council's main demand, he believes that they would be the best solution for the country. He said that they would stop

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the pressure now building up against the current government and allow Saakashvili to continue to lead the country, "just not with a 90 percent approval rating." If the elections are not held early, Usupashvili says, the street could force Saakashvili out and replace him with someone totally new.

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Opposition and Government Share Risk,  
Threshold Offer Not Enough  
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16. (C) Usupashvili acknowledged to Ambassador that the opposition, as well as the government, is at high risk due to the pending protest. He said that with the United Council representing all parties except New Rightists, the opposition could all be "completely destroyed" at once, should something bad happen. Again, he implied such action could be instigated by Russia. In response to Ambassador's question regarding Saakashvili's offer to lower the threshold for participation in Parliament, Usupashvili said "we are not stupid; we know they were holding this for such a time when they were under pressure." Usupashvili restated that whatever happens, he does not want to see another "force majeure" situation in Georgia. He is asking people to "be responsible."

17. (C) (Note: Usupashvili and fellow United National Council opposition leader Konstantine Gamsakhurdia are scheduled to meet with NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer's staff and Javier Solana's staff in Brussels this week to discuss the state of the opposition and upcoming elections. They then travel to Washington, D.C. to meet with EUR/CARC and Senator Graham, among others. Usupashvili plans to return to Georgia the morning of November 2. End note.)

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Comment  
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18. (C) The Ambassador advised Usupashvili that he continues to hear the Georgian people do not want more instability, and that the harsh rhetoric used by both the opposition and government does not help the situation. He applauded Usupashvili reaching out quietly to Burjanadze, and encouraged further dialogue between the opposition and government. The Ambassador agreed that Burjanadze and the government are trying to determine what action to take regarding the November 2 protest. The government has been largely quiet about it. The opposition has put Saakashvili's government in a corner, where he is largely unable to concede anything more at this point without seriously losing face. It appears that the opposition has gotten to this point without now knowing what to do next, especially if things get out of control.

TEFFT